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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 001489

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TAGS: [KWBG](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#)
SUBJECT: MIXED REACTION TO ANNOUNCEMENT OF PRISONERS RELEASE

Classified By: Consul General Jacob Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Begin Summary. The July 17 posting of the names of 256 Palestinian prisoners who are scheduled for early release on July 20 generated mostly positive press coverage, including front page photos of families celebrating the anticipated release. The Q Ministry of Prisoners Affairs welcomed the release of any prisoners, but criticized the "unilateral" nature of the release and urged Palestinian-Israeli negotiations on criteria for release. Privately, Qadura Fares and Fadwa Barghouti told PolChief that they want to see the release of those prisoners and the release of prisoners from the pre-Oslo period serving long sentences. Fadwa expressed disappointment with the "modest" release and said the significance of the prisoner issue for all Palestinians means the GoI must do more on this file to support PM Fayyad. End Summary.

Public Reactions to the Release

¶2. (SBU) Local press led with headlines that the GoI approved on July 17 256 Palestinian prisoners to be released July 20. All three Palestinian dailies ran the complete lists inside their pages and carried front page pictures of families celebrating the anticipated releases. Local media reports that the prisoners are West Bank residents who served approximately two-thirds of their sentences and are not directly responsible for Israeli deaths. According to the media, 61 prisoners have served more than two-thirds of their terms, 93 prisoners have served over half but less than two-thirds of their sentences, and 102 prisoners have served over a third but less than half of their sentences. The media also reports that six of the 256 prisoners are women and that most are Fatah or Fatah-affiliated with the exception of PFLP member Abd al-Rahim Mallouh.

¶3. (SBU) PA Minister of Prisoners Affairs, Ashraf Ajrami told al-Arabbiya that the release is "a unilateral Israeli move," and that the PA did not participate in selecting the list of prisoners. Ajrami said the PA requested a joint Israeli-Palestinian Prisoners Committee meeting, but the request was turned down. He added, however, that the PA welcomes the release of any prisoners from Israeli jails and hopes this move will trigger serious negotiations on the release of all prisoners. Undersecretary for the Ministry of Prisoners Affairs, Ziad Abu Ayn, also told the press that the Ministry rejects the list of prisoners because it does not meet the Palestinian criteria of releasing the oldest prisoners first. He added that 64 Palestinian prisoners have been in Israeli jails over 20 years and Said al-Ataba, who is not on the release list, has been in jail for 31 years. Ayn noted that the Israeli list includes prisoners who have been in jail for one to eight years, that only one prisoner was sentenced to 20 years (Muhannad Jarada from 1989-2009), and

that eight were due to be released in 2007.

Palestinian Prisoners' Release Advocates

14. (C) Qadura Fares, who chairs the Palestinian delegation to the joint Israeli-Palestinian Prisoners Committee, told PolChief July 18, "Unfortunately, Israel made the same mistake as before by keeping its same policy on prisoners." He said by not consulting the PA before compiling the names of prisoners to be released, the GoI sent the message that it is not serious about this issue. Fares welcomed the release of any Palestinian prisoners, but criticized the "unilateral nature" of the Israeli decision and said prisoners who have been in jail for 20 plus years or who have medical problems should be released.

15. (C) Fadwa BQghouti told PolChief July 18 that her husband jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti is pleased when any Palestinian prisoner is freed, but he does not see this move as a major step forward. According to Fadwa, during their July 17 visit, Marwan expressed frustration with the list of prisoners to be released and said the release of prisoners sentenced for long periods of time would be more symbolic for Palestinians and would demonstrate greater GoI commitment to a political process and to PM Fayyad's government. "We had higher expectations, so this step is modest," said Fadwa. "If Israel was serious about releasing prisoners with no blood on their hands, Israel would release 9,500 prisoners," she said. Fadwa added that the GoI should develop more serious criteria as well as a timetable for the release of prisoners. In order for PM Fayyad to receive credit for the release, she said the GoI must release a greater number of prisoners and also release prisoners from